Reading # 7

Geography of China

Ancient China was naturally isolated from the rest of the world by its geography. For thousands of years, the Chinese believed that they were pretty much the only people in the world except for some barbarians to the north. China’s natural barriers to the west, south and east helped to protect the ancient Chinese people from invasion.

Dangerous Deserts

The Gobi Desert lies to the north of China and is one of the driest deserts in the world. The desert covers 500,00 square miles. In the Gobi you’ll find large barren expanses of gravel plains and rocky outcrops. The climate here is extreme as temperatures reach 40 degrees (C) in the summer and -40 degrees (C) in the winter. Precipitation averages less than 100 mm per year, while some areas only get rain once every two or three years. Strong winds up to 140 km per hour make travel dangerous in the spring and fall. Great Gobi National Park is one of the world’s largest biospheres, with an area larger than Switzerland. It contains the last remaining wild two-humped camels, wild donkeys and a small population of Gobi bears, the only desert-inhabiting bear. There is some chance for water, but an oasis is a rare occurrence.

Taklamakan Desert is the second largest desert in the world and is located in western China. It is nicknamed the Sea of Death because it is rumored that if anyone goes in they do not come out alive. This desert is best known for its poisonous snakes, frequent sandstorms, boiling days, freezing nights, and intense water shortage. Very few people have survived crossing the Taklamakan Desert.

Numerous Mountains

The Himalayas are located in southwest China right on the border of China and India. The Himalayas are one of the world’s largest mountain ranges and home to the ten highest peaks in the world. One of the peaks is Mount Everest which is 5.5 miles tall. These tall rocky peaks make crossing the Himalayas nearly impossible.
Vast Seas

To the east and the south, China is bordered by water. These include:

- South China Sea
- Yellow Sea
- Pacific Ocean

During ancient times building boats that could withstand these harsh seas was difficult, so the early Chinese had no way of crossing the vast seas that surround them.

Two Major Rivers “The Great Sorrow”

All rivers in China were called the Great Sorrow because they would flood every year and could destroy any towns built along them.

The Huang He (Yellow) River is about 3,000 miles long - about the distance from New York to California. Chinese Civilization began along this river because of the fertile soil. It was nicknamed the Yellow River because of the fertile soil it deposits called "loess" that is yellow in color.

The Yangzte (Long) River is the third longest river in the world measuring nearly 4,000 miles long. At its shallowest point the river is about 25 feet deep and during the flooding it gets about 160 feet deep.

People in China settled near the rivers because of the fertile soil. However, they had to build their homes and towns on high ground because of the annual flooding.